The Black Cat

December
1905

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The Flagging of Santa Claus.*

BY IK. C. DAVIDSON.

THE Downings were in distressed circumstances. George had volunteered in an Iowa regiment and was in Dixie with Sherman. His wife, with the two little children, Mollie, nearly five, and Tootsie, only two, were bravely trying to hold a land claim, which he had preempted two years before, but on which he had done little, save build a fairly comfortable cabin. He left his corn crop with his wife and few and distant neighbors.

It had been a hard fall. What men had not joined Grant's army did what they could, with the aid of the women, to get in the crops and make all comfortable for the winter. The Downings lived quite a distance from the nearest neighbor and nearly eight miles from the nearest railroad station, but their house stood less than a hundred yards from the railroad track, just at the angle where the road curved sharply to follow a ridge into the hamlet of Dorntug.

From the gathered corn crop, some debts had been paid and a meager supply of fuel and provisions laid in for the winter. Cold, stormy weather had set in early and fuel had gone rapidly until little was left but corn and twisted grass to keep the family from

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freezing, and Christmas eve found them with some corn meal, a little bacon and a few potatoes, as their sole prospect for a Christmas dinner, and absolutely not a ray of hope that Santa Claus would be able to get to that lonely cabin on the bleak, storm-bound Iowa prairie.

So Mama Downing told Mollie and Tootsie. Of course, Tootsie didn't understand, but looked wonderingly into Mama's tear-dimmed eyes, as though one Santa Claus, more or less, made no difference with her, if Mama wouldn't feel so bad about it. It was different with Mollie. She remembered last Christmas when they were back on a visit to grandma in Ohio. They had a Christmas tree, and Santa Claus came and took things off, and she got a dolly that squeaked, and a nice big red hood, and a set of dishes, and lots of candy, and a book with "naminal" in it, and a thing that jumped its legs and arms when you pulled a string, and "lots of fings." And they had chicken and pies and cakes — one cake had red candy on top — and nuts and oranges, and it was nice and warm in the house, and papa was there, and now, — oh, dear! — tomorrow was Christmas, and no chicken and no papa and no Santa Claus! And it was so cold.

"Mama, what's Christmas for, if Santa Claus can't find the way to all the houses and we can't have chicken?" asked broken-hearted Mollie.

The horrors of war, of cold and hunger and loneliness, were to Mrs. Downing's aching heart and mind little inspiration upon which to build at that time an entertaining story of the Star of Bethlehem and the Nativity. What was the use?

To that childish mind, Christmas was the embodiment of warmth, of plenty, of joy and peace. She could not remember other Christmases than that last one oasis in her subsequent barren life, to which she reverted as being the one time in the year that would bring with it a kind of happiness that lasted a long while and left such pleasant memories.

The mother realized, in a hopeless sort of way, that no adequate explanation could be made, and did not attempt one.

"Don't you see, dear, we live so far away from town and other folks, that maybe Santa can't find us? And then, you know, papa is way, way, way off with the soldiers, and can't bring us any

chickens and things? Let us all go to bed, and maybe next year Santa Claus will come. And now let's pray for God to take care of papa, so he can come back home soon."

In the simple prayer came to little Mollie an inspiration. Why not pray for God to show Santa Claus the way to their house that night? It was a simple faith, and took simple words. There was no doubt but He would do it. And then again, maybe she could help God make Santa Claus find her house.

It had commenced to snow hard and blow, and maybe the house could not be seen. By lighting the lantern and hanging it in the window with the little red hood she got last Christmas, Santa Claus would see the light and the hood and know that was the place where the little girl lived to whom he had given the hood, and he must stop there.

The mother had not the heart to object to the idea, although she trusted that something might happen in the morning to make her little girl forget the lantern in the window, the red hood and the failure of Santa Claus. The lantern was lighted and placed in the window, and the red hood hung above it, and soon the cabin was wrapped in slumber, although rocked by the raging storm without.

Tim Manahan was a character. Tall and athletic, with mild blue eyes, and a voice like a woman, he had nerves of steel and an affection for children that bordered on a mania. He had started with the A. & M. Railway Company on a construction train, when the line was being built through Iowa. In the early days of railroad construction on our western prairies, the process was a simple one. The object was to get from one main point to another in the easiest and least expensive manner. This was the method in which the A. & M. was constructed from the Mississippi River to Council Bluffs in the early 60's. To cross a river or creek a detour would be made to strike a branch leading down to the main bed; then a small bridge; then up another branch or ravine out to high ground. Out on the prairie ties were laid on the sod and ridges followed to avoid culverts. The result of this plan of engineering was a serpentine track, full of sharp curves and heavy grades, but built at a nominal cost.

Tim Manahan was now the crack passenger engineer of the road.

His speed record had soon won for him the title of the "Wild Irishman" and his marvelous runs under adverse conditions were the talk of firesides far and near.

No. 5 from the east was late Christmas morning. In fact, a train on time on the A. & M. was a novelty and an object of suspicion. But there was good excuse for trains being late that night, as there had extended over the entire country a driving snow storm. Usually due at Croxton — the west Iowa division station where engines were changed — at 2.30 A. M., it was nearly 4 o'clock when Tim Manahan backed his engine up the main line and was coupled to No. 5's train.

The A. & M. had not been completed west of the Mississippi River, and consequently there was but local travel, and on that night a meager sprinkling of passengers occupied the two coaches. This was before the advent of sleepers, and even one combination baggage and mail car served all purposes of the business handled at that time.

There was no such thing as Janney couplers and Miller buffer platforms, and vestibuled cars heated by steam and lighted by electricity. The engineer had no "wind jammers" to work, no injectors nor water glass. He took chances against fate "by holding her back in the breeching on sand," with the aid of a hind "shack," if that worthy had time to get out to his post. The gauge of water in the boiler was determined by three "try" cocks on the boiler-head, that required an expert to tell by opening occasionally whether it was covered with water or whether the outrush of steam had pulled water up with it from some distance below — maybe from off the crown sheet — in which case, the moment cold water was pumped in on the superheated fire surface, there was "something doing." Then, those pumps of thirty-five years ago were wonderful inventions. The engineer of today would have his trade to learn over.

But Tim understood his engine and was proud of it, as he was also of the train and the road. He was a type of the pioneer engineer, — a genius in mechanics, and a statesman in the general art of railroading. He was his own traveling engineer and could give the master mechanic pointers on link motion, and his fireman lectures on the theory of coal and oil economy and easy firing, and

almost rebuild his engine on the road from his tool box. In fact, in those crude, easy days, there was no specializing in one branch of the business, as is required in the present day of high efficiency and advanced methods. A jack of all trades has no standing with railroads today.

The snow, which had been falling, now turned to hard, flinty pebbles. It was getting colder, and the ground was assuming the character of ice. On the A. & M. at this time there was not a foot of fence, and out on the prairie, as the rails were but a few inches above the level of the surrounding land, when it had snowed several inches a passing traveler could not have located the road, save for the telegraph poles that followed the track.

The conductor hurried up to the engine to compare watches, and said to Tim, "Despatcher says there's nothing on the road to meet, and he will not have a red light against us to the junction, so you can turn her loose."

"All right, old man; tie your hat on. Are you fixed?"

"Let her go," said the conductor, as he gave Tim a "high ball."

Tim's engine picked her train up rapidly, and when they struck the down grade west of town, they were going forty miles an hour.

"Keep her good and hot," yelled Tim to his fireman. "I want to give those fellows a Christmas gift ride."

On top of the hill the road straightened out over the prairie, with stations far apart. The headlight showed the line of telegraph poles ahead, but not a sign of the track, the hard beating snow having covered the earth and track to a depth of an inch or so over the rails. With a liberal use of sand Tim had maintained a terrific speed even up the hill, and, now that they were out on the prairie, he settled down to a study of the water and steam gauges, with one eye on the hail-like cloud of snow that fell in front of his headlight.

Ten miles had hardly been covered when — "biff, bang!" — the headlight went out with the noise of breaking glass, and the train rushed on in the storm-enveloped darkness. Tim fell off his seat, threw the reversing lever in the corner and started to shut off steam, but when he felt the engine riding as smoothly as before, he concluded the pilot had kicked up something that had struck the headlight, and it was not good policy to stop out on the prairie for

the trifling matter of a light that only served to make more uncertain the prospect ahead.

So the "Wild Irishman" hooked the lever up the quadrant and gave the throttle another pull. He was giving "those fellows" the ride of their lives. Sixty miles an hour seemed a jog trot. If there were rails under the train, they could only be located by an occasional high joint.

"If we don't go out into the country, we will make the junction in — whoa up! — What's that?" yelled the fireman.

Tim had been feeling of the water, and at the fireman's exclamation glanced out, and there, coming rapidly towards him, apparently, was a blazing red light.

"Holy St. Patrick! Where did that thing come from?" said Tim, as he shut off steam and called for brakes. He knew there was no station near there, and a red light out on the prairie was a signal he dare not refuse to obey.

The absence of his headlight made the light ahead more uncanny. When finally the train came to a stop, Tim climbed down from his engine and went to the front, where, to his amazement, he found the pilot within a few feet of a house, from whose only window shone a red light.

The red light was caused by Mollie's red hood which, shaken from its nail by the storm, had fallen in front of the lantern, tingeing its rays with a crimson glow. The fine, pebbly snow had packed between the rails so hard that the flanges hardly let the wheels touch the rails, so that when the train struck the sharp curve east of Dorntug a short distance from the cabin of the Downings, there was little or no "bite" on the rail for the flange, and the terrific speed of the train carried it straight ahead without any perceptible jar right on the smooth and frozen prairie.

There was wonder and consternation among the train crew and passengers, and frightened amazement on the part of Mrs. Downing, who had been awakened by the unusual noise and confusion without. Mutual explanations followed, in which the history of the light brought out the story of the absent soldier, the empty larder, the hopeless outlook for Santa Claus, and Mollie's faith.

A consultation was held in the baggage car, which the passengers attended. Clearly nothing could be done toward getting the

train on the track without help from headquarters. It would be simply death to start a man out in the storm to the nearest station, even if he could find it, so it was concluded to make themselves as comfortable as possible until daylight, and await developments.

While they were discussing the situation, Tim had gone over his engine to see what shape she was in and find out what had smashed his headlights. He found on the pilot frame and boiler head half a dozen prairie chickens, frozen stiff, that had been startled from their cover by the approaching light and had flown against the engine and headlight to their death. After draining his pipes to keep them from freezing, Tim took his trophies to the baggage car, where he said:

"Boys, I've been thinking about the little girl in that house. She put that light in the window to flag Santa Claus. By the eternals, I never failed to answer a signal yet, and I propose to answer this one. Rustle around now, you fellows, and see what you can find for Santa to give those little ones, — and don't forget grub."

The idea was a unique one, but taken up with enthusiasm by crew and passengers, who were glad of any diversion under the circumstances. A "taking of stock" followed. In the possession of the expressman was found a cedar tree that was to have adorned a belated Christmas celebration on a Nebraska prairie. It could not now even get to its destination in time to be much of a memory of that glad event. At any rate, the expressman said he would risk it, and it was hauled out and nailed upright in a box. Then the candles from the coach lamps were taken out and cut into pieces and fastened on the limbs. The newsboy's stock of candy, oranges, peanuts, apples, pies and cakes, was bought outright and loaded on the tree. From the grips of passengers were contributed various articles from stores intended for other little children, who could afford, however, to divide. And it made quite a respectable and suitable collection, with attractive variety.

Mrs. Downing was let into the enterprise and thankfully joined in making it a success. The prairie chickens had been dressed, and with wood from the coaches, were being cooked, with other articles, as fast as the facilities of the cabin would warrant.

Just as the day was breaking the train crew carried the tree

stealthily into the room where the two children were yet slumbering. Tim Manahan had rigged himself up as a fair representative of Santa Claus by a liberal use of clean white "waste," with which he made long whiskers and bushy hair. That, together with a stuffed overcoat, made him look considerably like the real thing.

The tree was placed at the foot of the bed, loaded down with presents and decorations, and the candles were lighted. Santa was stationed near the tree, with Mama near by in case the children were frightened, with the train crew and passengers in the background. The brakeman was an expert on the mouth organ and, when all was ready, began playing softly something as appropriate as his repertoire would permit.

The eyes of the sleepers slowly unclosed, and suddenly they sat up in bed, open-eyed at the lighted Christmas tree loaded with good things, at Santa Claus and the music.

"He comed! He comed!" cried Mollie, "I knew he'd come."

Then addressing Santa Claus, she asked, "Did you see my light, Mr. Santa Claus?"

"Bless your little heart! Of course I saw your light, and I just had to stop. Here's a few things for you and Tootsie," and he unloaded the tree on to the bed.

The wild ecstasy of joy of that Christmas morning was, to even those childish minds, a loving memory and sweet retrospection in after years.

How that Christmas was enjoyed by all hands; how with the coming of day and the lulling storm, word was sent to headquarters which brought a wrecking train that pulled No. 5 back on the track, have no particular place in this story.

With Tim, happy in the complete success of his impromptu and heavenly-inspired Christmas celebration in that humble cabin, the title of Santa Claus almost superseded that of "Wild Irishman." But Tim took it good-naturedly, and always, when passing the curve east of Dorntug, gave a toot of recognition, if he happened to see a little figure wearing a flaming red hood.

Jim, the Tinman.*

BY DAVID BRUCE FITZGERALD.

EEN shopping?" asked Charley Converse, happening to meet Miss Elizabeth Webb on a downtown Cincinnati street, and turning to walk with her.

"No. I'm just from a meeting of the Ethical Culture Association. Professor Max Burgheim gave us a delightful and convincing talk on Negation versus Affirmation."

"Interesting subject, but rather abstract, I should say," remarked Converse, to whom the phrase the young woman used so glibly conveyed no idea whatever.

"You wouldn't have thought so if you had heard the lecture," said Elizabeth, who was aglow with a recently awakened enthusiasm. "The Professor made it very plain that one of the great evils in life is the fact that most people are characteristically in an attitude of negation and that the one thing necessary to change the whole complexion of society is for everyone to put himself or herself in an affirmative position, or, in other words, to be as habitually ready to say Yes as he or she now is to say No."

"Beautiful theory, but impossible to apply," commented Charley, with a dawning notion of what the girl meant. "All philanthropic schemes would get a big lift; but, at the same time, it would open the way to being imposed on to an unlimited extent. Every day, one is asked to do a lot of things which he immediately sees he can't; requests are proffered which he must bluntly refuse; circumstances absolutely force him into the attitude of denial."

"Professor Burgheim anticipated that objection," Elizabeth answered. "He said that, influenced by false traditions and absurd customs, we take for granted in advance that the real wisdom of life is impracticable, and so it never verifies itself in our personal

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experiences, simply because it never occurs to us, or because we don't dare to apply it. And I thoroughly agree with him," she continued. "We don't dare to do the things we know we ought. It is cowardice which keeps our lives on a selfish plane. If we were braver, we would be infinitely better."

"Oh, I don't know that I would put it so strongly," said Converse. "It isn't so much a question of courage as of convenience."

"Then it is only so much the more humiliating. We haven't even the courage to face inconvenience. Tomorrow, we will go on in the same old way merely because it is the direction of least resistance. The complacent selfishness of human nature is appalling."

"Still, like poverty and many other things commonly classed as evils, it is something which we can't well get away from," returned Charley, who was sometimes rather bewilderedly aware that Elizabeth's nature was strung in a painfully high key. "I fancy that the actual experiment of putting yourself in the characteristically affirmative position would soon bring you around to the usual point of view."

"After all, that is the only way of settling the question," she said.

"Why don't you try it, then?" Converse asked, in the tone of one giving a challenge.

"I will," returned Elizabeth, decisively. "Only, since you are the sceptic, it would probably be more satisfactory if you should make the experiment yourself."

Instantly, an idea, which was like a beam of light flung across darkness, travelled through Charley's mind. For more than a year he had been in love with Elizabeth Webb. A dozen times he had hovered on the verge of asking her to marry him; but the avowal of his regard had always been restrained by the double consideration of ignorance on the point of the girl's own feelings and of suspicion that her father did not favor his suit. Of course, under such circumstances, he had very carefully reviewed the various ways in which, with the surest guarantee of success, he might propose to Elizabeth; and now it occurred to him that if she should pledge herself to accede to any and every request which might be made to her during a specified period the opportunity would be given him of putting her in a position where she must either accept him or utterly repudiate a principle of conduct which she seemed

inclined to defend strenuously. Converse had not time to reason it all out to the point of perfect inward illumination; but the suggestion, vague as it was, brought him into hasty agreement with a proposition which he would otherwise have regarded as preposterously idealistic.

"All right," he said, with a smile which was intended to conceal the real seriousness of his assent. "I solemnly promise, on condition of your doing the same, that, during the entire period of waking existence tomorrow, I will say yes to all requests and petitions of whatsoever nature, and that I will carry out the affirmative to the limit of my ability and of the designated time."

"Do you really mean it?" Elizabeth asked.

"Positively."

"Then you may depend on my making the same experiment; and we will afterward compare notes. I am quite convinced that we will get a glimpse of the fact that the joy of life lies in that direction."

"I hope so," Converse replied, with a heartiness which Elizabeth, if she had dreamed of its real cause, would have found vastly embarrassing.

Charley Converse, who lived in Avondale, a suburb just north of the city, awoke early the next morning and breakfasted alone. With an honest determination to stand by the experiment he had promised to make, he did not anticipate the appearance of any circumstances which would seriously disarrange his programme for the day, and he quite confidently counted on devoting the morning to business, and on asking Elizabeth to go driving about four o'clock. Immediately after breakfast, he left the house, with the purpose of walking at least a part of the way to the office. Milk and bread wagons were rattling from house to house, but, as yet, few pedestrians were abroad. Just as he turned into the main avenue, Converse saw a red, box van approaching him, and noticed that the driver, apparently intoxicated, was reeling on the seat; and, a moment later, the man lost his balance, lurched forward and fell to the ground. Charley, obeying one of the primary impulses of civilization, ran to the man's assistance, dragged him from beneath the wheels of the wagon and lifted his head, recognizing at a glance that the fellow was very ill.

"I reckon I'm done for, guv'ner," muttered the driver, gazing up into Charley's face and breathing laboriously. "Don't turn the team over to the p'lice. Just drive straight on . . . until . . . ."; and the speaker lost consciousness and was unable to proceed.

As always happens at such times, spectators seemed to materialize out of air. Someone brought a glass of water. Presently, a couple of policemen pushed through the rapidly thickening circle; and one of them relieved Converse, while the other, after a single look at the prostrate driver, ran to the corner and turned in an ambulance call. After a seemingly interminable quarter of an hour, a clanging of a gong announced the approach of the hospital wagon; and a police surgeon, springing down from his foot-board, knelt on the asphalt, placed his fingers on the wrist of the stricken man, and shook his head doubtfully.

"Heart failure," the doctor murmured, proceeding with incredible rapidity to administer a stimulant hypodermically. Then, at a nod from the surgeon, the patient was placed on a stretcher and lifted into the ambulance, which at once moved off; and the crowd disappeared with the same mysterious rapidity which had marked its assembling.

"I guess we'd better take that team to a livery stable," said one of the policemen to the other, indicating the van, to which a couple of undersized, gray horses were attached.

"I'll look after it, if you don't mind," said Charley, recalling the fact that he had been requested to do so. "The driver told me what to do with it."

"All right, sir," replied the policeman who had made the remark, and who recognized Converse as a resident of the neighborhood; and the officers, glad to be relieved of further trouble, strolled away.

Charley inspected the vehicle of which he had thus assumed charge. It was a box van, of medium size, and painted a bright red; and the legend, "Jim, the Tinman," inscribed on the sides in gilt letters, suggested that the owner was one of those itinerant venders of kitchen utilities whose field of operations lies exclusively in the rural districts.

"Rum go this," said Converse to himself, mounting to the driv-

ing seat, gathering up the reins and speaking to the horses. "Elizabeth will find it interesting to hear about. Let me see; the man told me to drive straight on . . . until. Until what, I wonder? Likely, until the horses, of their own notion, turn in somewhere. Possibly, until I encounter someone who will put in a claim for the outfit. The fellow certainly had in mind that I would bring up somewhere shortly. He can't have meant me to drive through to the shore of Lake Erie."

An hour passed, the gray horses plodded steadily forward, several outlying suburbs were traversed, and Converse began to wonder whether, after all, the sick man had really known what he was saying when he made his vague and unusual request of a perfect stranger.

"Deucedly awkward if I can't manage to rid myself of this stylish rig," Charley reflected, remembering his solemn pledge to carry out every request received that day to the limit of his ability and of the designated time. "If something or other doesn't turn up, there's nothing for it but to drive on until midnight. I'm not going to give Elizabeth a chance to say that I went back on the experiment."

At the end of another hour, Converse concluded that this determination seriously threatened to carry him through to Lake Erie, or, at least, much further in that direction than he cared to go. He was far in the country now, and the van was rolling along between broad meadows and fields in which the wheat was beginning to show yellow shadings as it bent in the breeze. Charley would have appreciated the peaceful prospect thoroughly but for the fact that his mind was preoccupied with a deepening perplexity, in which the disposal of the van, his work at the office, and his promise to Elizabeth Webb were strangely blended. Except as a question of conscientious regard for duty, his inability to appear at his desk did not greatly trouble him, as his position happened to be one which an unannounced absence would not endanger; but he was genuinely concerned over the fact that, with each step of the horses, he seemed to be putting himself more and more distinctly in the position of making off with property which did not belong to him; and he also became aware of irritation at having pledged himself to a line of action the outcome of which promised to be ineffective

in the establishment of any truth more significant than the familiar one that it is possible for an ordinarily intelligent person to do extremely foolish things.

These confused meditations were finally interrupted. As the van approached a small house, standing close by the roadside, a woman emerged from the door and signalled the driver to stop; but Charley's sudden hope that this might prove to be the home of Jim, the Tinman, was destined to be dashed.

"I want a colander," the woman said, as the van drew up beside her.

"Certainly, Madam," replied Converse, to whom it had not previously occurred to offer the wares in the wagon for sale, and who, though realizing that such a course would raise a moral question, decided in favor of a continuance of his experiment. Descending from the driving seat, Charley went to the rear of the van, opened the doors, and peered into the semi-darkness of the interior. Within, he recognized coffee pots, bunches of muffin rings, saucepans and graters, — a bewildering variety, indeed, of tin things; but his eye encountered no colanders, and, after a moment, he climbed into the wagon for the purpose of making further explorations.

On a large number of previous occasions, Charley Converse had experienced varying degrees of the emotion known as surprise, but he could not recall ever having been quite so nearly keeled over as he was by a discovery he made in Jim, the Tinman's wagon. Having failed to find a colander in any of the racks, or attached to any of the numerous hooks with which the interior of the van was furnished, Converse, continuing his search, noticed a peach box, which had been pushed into the recess under the driving seat. It was apparently filled with crumpled newspapers; but Charley, fancying it might contain colanders, drew it out and proceeded to examine its contents. Removing one of the light slats nailed across the top, and casting aside a layer of loose paper, he thrust his hand into the box and brought to light a compact bundle, one glance at which almost literally petrified him with astonishment. It was a package of hundred dollar bills, the ends of the notes projecting beyond the edges of the broad paper band which confined them. Converse gasped; then, instinctively, grappled again with

his fingers in the box, and was rewarded by having it yield a similar bundle of fifties. The peach crate was filled almost to the top with money.

"Gee! The tinware business must be profitable," muttered the young man, determining to make an exhaustive investigation, but, on account of the waiting customer, thinking it best to postpone it. Accordingly, Charley hastily pushed the peach box into the niche from which he had drawn it, backed out of the van and closed the folding doors.

"I regret, Madam, that I haven't a single colander in stock," he said to the woman; and, with such obvious untruthfulness to his assumed character that he failed to ask her whether he could not sell her something else, he quickly mounted the wagon and drove on. He could see that the road, at some distance ahead, was bordered on either side by woodland, and Converse resolved to stop there and continue his researches in the peach box. In the meantime, he could think of but one possible solution of the problem. The money was doubtless counterfeit, and Jim, the Tinman, whoever he might be, was the agent who, under the pretense of conducting a perambulatory trade, conveyed the spurious notes into the country districts where they might more easily be put in circulation. This explained why the stricken driver, in his last conscious moment, as Charley now recalled, had asked him not to turn the van over to the police.

"This undoubtedly will interest Elizabeth," he mused, with a grim smile. "Also, it may prove exceedingly interesting to me before I'm through with it;" and he fell to considering whether, in case his suspicions were verified, it would be best simply to abandon the wagon and make the best of his way back to town or whether he should put the van in charge of the authorities, with a narrative of all the circumstances.

Before coming to a definite conclusion, Converse arrived at the woods-bordered stretch of highway, and, assuring himself that no one was approaching from either direction, he drew up to the fence, tied the horses, and entered the van, where he quickly convinced himself that the peach box contained an enormous amount of money, but, in the light of rapidly burning matches, he was at a loss to determine the spuriousness or genuineness of the notes. He

had no real doubt on this point, but was anxious to confirm his conjectures; and, while he was puzzling over it, he became suddenly aware of a shadow at the open end of the van, and, turning, he found himself staring into the muzzle of a revolver, held by a roughly-dressed man, whose face, in the square of light, was merely a dark blur.

"Now, young feller, you stay right where you are and keep quiet," said the man, menacingly. "One squeak out of you and I'll blow the top of your head off."

The doors of the van were slammed shut, the hasp rattled over the staple and Converse was in darkness. He made a dash at the doors, but the fastenings held. He was a prisoner; and, presently, the van began to move.

Charley realized the futility of calling out. A cry would be unavailing unless he happened to raise his voice at the precise moment when the van happened to be passing a house or another vehicle; and even then his captor, or rather captors, for he could hear talking outside, might easily invent a plausible explanation. It would probably occur to them to say that they were playing a practical joke on one of their comrades. Accordingly, Converse, with a solicitude which he did not try to conceal from himself, settled down on the floor of the wagon to await the outcome of events. His first conjecture was that he had fallen into the hands of highwaymen, who, having somehow learned that Jim, the Tinman, had a large amount of presumably good money in his wagon, had made up their minds to appropriate it. Later, it occurred to him that the men were probably confederates of the Tinman, who had been expecting his arrival, and who, discovering the van in charge of a stranger, had determined to seize it. In either case, the prisoner, with deepening anxiety, wondered what disposal they intended to make of him, Charley Converse.

The practical answer to this mental query was delayed for a time which could be estimated only by hours. The van rolled steadily onward; at first smoothly, as though still on the turnpike, but, after a time, with a jolting which spoke eloquently of unfrequented roads. Occasionally, a soft, brushing sound told the prisoner that the top or sides of the wagon were being swept by the boughs of trees; but, aside from these vague indications, Converse

was totally unable to determine the direction taken or the nature of the country traversed.

In the dark interior of the van, Charley did some hard thinking, and finally, because this seemed to result in nothing, some intent listening. He found that by placing his ear against the front of the van, just back of the driving seat, he could catch an occasional phrase uttered by those outside, of whom there seemed to be three. The prisoner thus managed to secure two items of information: That his captors were making for a place where they expected to abandon the van and continue their journey, flight, or whatever it might be called, in some other vehicle, and, secondly, that the men outside did not know what amount of money the peach box contained. Once, when the wheels were passing over soft ground, Charley distinctly heard a voice remark that its owner would be disappointed if his share did not amount to two hundred thousand dollars, to which another voice replied that one hundred thousand apiece was as much as could reasonably be expected.

"Very well," muttered the prisoner; "since you gentlemen don't seem to be acquainted with the actual state of affairs, I think I will take a hand in the game."

Converse could not have explained either the origin of the idea or the motive which prompted the action. He was animated merely by an instinctive desire to revenge himself on the men who had inconvenienced and humiliated him. It did not occur to him that the expedient he adopted would effectively outwit his captors. His thinking was reduced to the elemental proposition that they had given him trouble and that he would return it in kind to the extent of his ability. Working silently, he lifted the lightly-nailed slats from the top of the peach box and transferred most of the packages it contained to the interiors of the coffee pots and covered saucepans hanging on the sides of the van, reserving a few of the bundles for another purpose. He then refilled the box with the heaviest articles on which he could lay his hands; a number of iron weights, belonging to kitchen scales, lending themselves admirably to his design. Having thus packed the crate carefully, he put on a top layer of money, covered this with newspapers and replaced the slats, pressing the nails home to their places.

"Now, my hearties," he reflected, mentally addressing the men

outside, "unless you examine the interior of this crate when you make your transfer to another wagon, which perhaps you won't think of doing, you may ultimately find that you've gone to a lot of nearly useless trouble."

As Converse, settling down to await the outcome, coolly considered what he had done in his angry and reckless mood, he began to fear that if his captors should discover the trick he had attempted they would visit their wrath on him personally; and indeed, feeling that it would be infinitely safer, he was on the point of going to work to restore original conditions when the van definitely came to a halt. The prisoner was not obliged to wait long for information of what would happen. His captors worked with amazing expedition. They suddenly opened the doors and ordered Charley out; and, as soon as his feet touched the ground, seized and securely bound him. Then, after the peach box had been removed, Converse was lifted, and tossed back into the van, and the doors were closed on him.

The brief interval between his exit and re-entrance gave Charley only a very few distinct impressions: That his captors were rough-looking fellows, whose faces were covered with improvised masks; that the van was drawn up in front of an apparently deserted cabin, which stood in the midst of scrubby timber; that a fleet-looking horse, attached to a buggy, was hitched to a neighboring tree; and that the position of the sun indicated the middle of the afternoon. A few minutes passed; then someone thumped on the side of the van, and a voice said: "Good-by, young feller. The hosses an' wagon are yours. We're sorry ter leave you in this distressin' condition arter the good turn you done us, but my pards ain't willin' ter trust you. The nags is tied, so you needn't be afraid they'll run away."

There was a sound of feet, then a thud of hoofs, then silence.

Converse at once set desperately to work to free himself. If he had been told in advance that it would take him a good hour, backed up against a hanging horse-radish grater, to sever the rope with which he was secured, he would not have believed it. Besides being very tedious, the task of cutting the cords which bound his wrists was a matter of extreme delicacy, the danger of opening an artery being imminent; and it was quite five o'clock before

Charley, after lying down on the floor of the van and desperately kicking the doors open, emerged into the open air.

All day long, Converse, without discussing the matter with himself, had confidently counted on getting back to the city in time to propose to Elizabeth Webb; but now, realizing that the evening was approaching and that he had no idea where he was, he began to doubt whether it would be possible for him to carry out this part of his programme, and, as happens under such circumstances, the importance of doing so immediately assumed unusual prominence in his mind. Dominated by this purpose, and hastily deciding that he would be less likely to encounter his former captors if he should go back rather than forward, he turned the horses about and struck into a long-unused track, which he vaguely hoped would bring him out somewhere. It did finally open on a country road, which latter, a mile farther on, crossed a turnpike; but the dusk had fallen before Charley, by making some inquiries, located himself and determined the direction he should take. Then he drove furiously; abandoning, because it would delay him, all thought of turning the van over to the authorities of any of the villages through which he passed, and bent only on reaching the home of Elizabeth before it became too late to conventionally call on that young lady. At eight o'clock, with horses which were showing signs of distress, he passed through Reading, and at fourteen minutes after nine he drew up before Mr. Webb's Mt. Auburn residence, and was gratified to note that all the lights in the house were burning.

"Keep an eye on that wagon until I come out," Converse said, thrusting a coin into the hand of Mr. Webb's stable boy, the first person he encountered; then he made a dash for the front door.

"Miss Elizabeth at home?" he asked of the maid who answered the bell.

"Yes, sir; you will find her in the drawing room."

The brightness of the drawing room, as Charley entered it, revealed two haggard figures. Converse was indescribably dusty and dishevelled; Elizabeth Webb's face was very pale and her eyes were swollen; but each was so preoccupied as not to notice the signs of distress displayed by the other.

"Elizabeth," said the young man, almost before he had shaken

hands, "I've had the experience of my life, but there isn't time to tell you about it this evening. I've had just one purpose in mind all day, but I came awfully near not being able to carry it out. I love you and I want you to marry me."

"Oh, Charley, please don't talk about such things this evening," replied the girl, sadly rather than with any show of resentment. "We're in dreadful trouble. Haven't you heard?"

"Heard? No; what's the matter?"

"Why, father's bank was robbed of more than a million dollars last night, and they can't get the slightest trace of the money. The first person to enter the bank this morning — I don't remember who it was now — found the watchman bound and gagged, the vault open and the money gone, and that's all they know about it. Father says that unless the money is recovered the bank will be compelled to close and that he will be absolutely ruined"; and the girl began to weep softly.

A sudden, great light dawned on Converse, who, because of inability to conceive of good money being transported in such fashion, had up to that moment cherished the illusion that the notes in the peach box were counterfeit.

"Hold on, Elizabeth," Charley exclaimed, so taken by surprise that even the thought of the proposal he had just made was swept from his mind. "Don't cry until you know the worst. I've got most of that money in a wagon out there on the street."

Elizabeth, making little dabs at her eyes, looked at him with an expression which indicated a rising doubt of his entire sanity.

"It's true," Converse continued, noticing her incredulity, and perversely determining to intensify it. "I may add that it is neatly stowed away in coffee pots and saucepans."

"What is the matter with you, Charley?" the girl asked, with manifest anxiety.

"Nothing; that is, nothing I can stop to explain. Where is your father?"

"He is down at the bank. The directors are having a meeting to see if they can arrange some way of going on."

"Very well. Please telephone Mr. Webb to expect me. Ask him to have the directors on the sidewalk, ready to help me carry an assortment of tinware into the vault. Good night, Elizabeth.

I'll be around in the morning to tell you all about it and to get your answer to that question."

When he drew up before the door of the Telephone Exchange Bank, Converse actually did find two of the directors waiting on the curb, drawn there by the vague expectation that something, they did not know exactly what, was about to happen; and, leaving the van with them, Charley went inside and sought an interview with President Webb.

"Good evening, Converse," said Mr. Webb, as the young man entered the room where the officials of the tottering institution were in session. "About half an hour ago, Elizabeth telephoned me and said you were coming down on some business connected with this robbery, but I could not quite make out what it was."

"It's just this, sir," replied Charley, glancing at the drawn faces about the long table in the middle of the room, "that in a wagon outside I have a lot of money which I think belongs to your bank, and I want help to bring it in. When that is safely done, I will tell you how it happened to come into my keeping."

There was an undignified rush to the sidewalk; and Converse, entering the van, proceeded, in much the same way that a vender of patent medicines distributes free samples, to thrust packages of bills into outstretched hands; and, shortly, the money was piled on the table in the directory room, several clerks were summoned, and the work of counting was begun.

"You will find the total amount a few thousand dollars short," Charley said, after the president and directors had done shaking hands with him and order had been restored. "You will understand why, when you hear my story"; and, to the intensely interested audience, he narrated his adventures during the day, experiencing no difficulty except at the point of explaining, without any reference to his compact with Elizabeth Webb, why he was so ready in the first place to undertake the driving of Jim, the Tinman's, van; and he managed to do this in a way satisfactory to himself.

"I regret," he said in conclusion, "that I can give you no valuable information as to the identity of the burglars. That they were cool, experienced hands seems evident from the fact that the removal of the stolen money from the city was postponed until

after daylight, when the passing of their wagon would attract no attention. Though I was closely associated with them during a considerable part of the day, they did not cultivate my personal acquaintance. One of them, however, seemed to feel a certain reluctance at parting; but I can truthfully say that my only personal regret is that I can't be present at the opening of that peach box."

Some of the directors thought this last observation so excruciatingly funny that they repeated it over and over again on the street the next day, and were greatly surprised to find that no one else seemed to regard it as peculiarly brilliant.

The following morning, at an hour even more unconventionally early than that of the previous evening had been unconventionally late, Charley again rehearsed his story to an audience which consisted exclusively of Miss Elizabeth Webb.

"Now, what remarkable experiences did you have yesterday?" Converse asked, when he had finished his narrative, and the various phases of it had been exhaustively discussed.

"None whatever," the girl replied. "Only two requests were made of me during the entire day. The first — that is to say, one of them — was yours, that I would telephone father, and tell him you were coming down to the bank with a wagon load of money; and you talked so queerly that I think I shouldn't have done it if I hadn't remembered our agreement."

"The other request was also mine, wasn't it?" Charley asked.

Elizabeth looked away and was silent.

"Do you say yes?"

She nodded an affirmative.

"And you will carry it out to the time limit?"

She nodded a second time.

"Which is?"

"Always," she said, turning toward him.

Rafferty's Goat.*

BY W. H. PHILLIPS.

AFFERTY'S cabin was pitched on a mountain ledge less than a quarter of a mile away from the Tullicott Mine, where he worked as an ordinary laborer. It was a wild and desolate country, without attractions of any sort except the glittering yellow metal for which men risked their lives, and there was not a decent abode within leagues, except the one which gruff Old Hutchins, Superintendent of the Tullicott, occupied with his charming and decidedly pretty young daughter, whom all of the rough men by whom she was surrounded worshipped.

Rafferty was a decent, clean, educated young fellow, who was fitted for better things, but whom disappointment had soured and made a social recluse. Somehow fortune had seemed to take a malicious pleasure in turning her back on him and thwarting all his plans and schemes, however well laid. He had lost every cent of his patrimony in the East, supposed friends had turned out traitors, kith and kin had all died, and he was left alone and next to penniless. He was young and strong and he turned his steps westward and out into the mining country, where he hoped to recoup his fortunes. All around where he located men "struck it rich," but Rafferty never struck anything but hard luck. Thoroughly disgusted and disheartened, imbued with a dislike for all human society, Rafferty applied to Old Hutchins for employment as an ordinary miner, was engaged, built his little cabin on the mountain side and dwelt there alone with only a fierce-looking Billy Goat for society. He did not desire any human company. He was pleasant with his co-laborers, but reticent, and showed so distinctly his aversion to having anything beyond business relations with them that, after a number of ineffectual

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attempts at sociability, they abandoned him to himself. "He was queer," some said. "Proud," said others. "Has had to come down a peg, and doesn't like it." As if anybody ever did like "coming down a peg!" Still others hinted at a mysterious love affair or something else in the past that had either soured him or made it convenient for him to conceal himself in the mining wilderness. There are untold, wonderful romances in a mining camp, but one is permitted to keep his private affairs to himself and no questions are asked. Curiosity might prove disastrous to the inquisitive seeker after knowledge that was none of his business. So Rafferty and his Goat were left alone — Rafferty because he wanted to be and the Goat because he fought for the privilege.

Nobody knew where the Goat had come from. He had wandered into the camp from over the mountains one day and with the free and independent manner of his species helped himself to the tin can which had contained Rafferty's lunch of beans. Probably there was something peculiarly appetizing to a Goat's taste in this particular brand of tin, for Billy at once struck up a friendship with Rafferty, followed him home and ensconced himself there with an arbitrary proprietorship. Rafferty took to him. Man is a gregarious animal and must have a companion of some sort. When he turns away from his own kind, if a four-footed thing comes along and evinces a desire to be friendly he will make it welcome. Rafferty and the Goat became inseparable, and no man ever had a dog that followed him so faithfully or attached itself to him more closely. The Goat cheered Rafferty and made life a little more endurable, and, not being particular as to his menu, he was no expense.

This was the state of affairs when "Old Hutchins'" daughter came from the East to spend a few weeks with her father in the camp. She had insisted upon coming for the novelty of it, and the old man — they called him "old man," but he was not old in reality, being not much over fifty — had yielded to her whim. He was very glad to have her with him as a matter of fact, and when the few weeks she was to stay had expired and she expressed her intention of remaining indefinitely he made no protest.

Rafferty heard of Avesta Hutchins' arrival and made it a point to keep out of her way. He had even less use for women than he

had for men. It had been a woman in the East who had first betrayed his confidence, first shaken his faith in the truth of humanity. He had ceased to have the smallest feeling for her, he laughed at the idea that he ever could have had any, but he retained the memory of the injury and he treasured it up against the sex. So when he heard the exploring party coming into the Mine and heard a woman's laugh as they entered the tunnel where he was at work, he turned off into a side excavation and remained there until he was sure they had all returned into the daylight again. His co-workers were not surprised. Those who entertained the "woman theory" chuckled over their cleverness in having guessed his supposed secret.

"You missed seein' a mighty pooty gal, old hoss," said one of them, as he emerged from his hiding place.

"He'll have another chance tomorrow," laughed grizzled Pete, the oldest miner and greatest liar in the camp. "She's comin' down agin to see what she didn't today!"

They all laughed at the thrust, even Rafferty, who appreciated the point of it, himself.

But the next day Jack Rafferty laid off and spent the best part of it wandering aimlessly over the mountains with the faithful Billy, who discovered several pieces of underbrush and rock which were agreeable to his appetite.

The sun was slowly setting in the western sky when Rafferty, awakening from a reverie into which his thoughts had plunged him, suddenly discovered that Billy had disappeared. He called, but got no responsive bleat, and after a futile search turned his steps to the cabin he called home, feeling sure that the faithful Billy would find his way thither sooner or later. The expression upon his face when he came in sight of the cabin was quite sufficient to excuse the merry peal of laughter which greeted him. Sitting on the ground just outside the open door was as fair a vision of a girl as any man could ask to see, and contentedly standing by her, browsing on a bunch of rough grass she held in her hand, was the truant Billy. The girl sprang to her feet and Billy lowered his head preparatory to a vigorous defense of her, when, discovering that the intruder was his master, he gave vent to a bleat of joy and resumed his meal.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Rafferty," said the girl in a frank, wholesome way. "I could not help laughing; you *did* look so odd!"

Jack Rafferty flushed, bowed with a semblance of the old Eastern manners, tried to say something, but stammered so dreadfully his voice was a series of sounds, not words.

"You must excuse my curiosity," the girl went on, extending a slender white hand, which he took and forgot to return, thereby forcing her to gently withdraw it. "I am Miss Hutchins. I am a very inquisitive person, and they told me there was one thing connected with the Tullicott Mine I had not seen. They said I would find it up here and it had a Goat — I'm very fond of Goats! — and its name was Rafferty! So here I came and a while ago the Goat joined me and we've become great friends already, as you see — and I'd like to be friends with its owner!"

She extended her hand again and he took it again, but this time had sense enough not to cling to it.

"I've been so interested," she continued, not giving him an opportunity to speak, and with an easy abandon that quite captivated him and drove away his shyness, "with everything I've seen since I came out here. It's all new to me and I think mining is very interesting, don't you? And mining men are all so nice, even if they are a little bit rough! And they all seem to have histories. They've told me a lot of them, though," she added doubtfully, "I'm not sure whether I can altogether believe them! Do you think that they don't — that is, some of them of course — always tell the truth?"

"It is possible that occasionally occurs," answered Rafferty drily.

"Well, I don't care," she pouted, "they are entertaining, any way, and I'm going to write a book when I go back East — or maybe I'll do them up into stories for the magazines. That really is why I made so bold as to come up here and intrude upon you. You're the only man working for Papa I have not met, and they said you kept out of my way on purpose. That made you just so much the more interesting and excited my curiosity, which is tremendously great. Honestly, I don't bite and I don't allow any man to keep out of my way when I want to see him. Now you won't mind my

having come here and looked through everything you have inside there, will you, because they said your story was by far the most interesting of any man's here, and I want you to tell it to me — for my book!"

She rattled all this off with hardly a pause for breath, giving him no chance to interpose a word had he desired to; but he was too surprised and charmed by the novelty of her presence and her manners to do anything but listen and gaze upon her with rapt but respectful admiration. The Goat, having finished his repast, came between them, buckling her arm between his horns and looking up at Rafferty with a wicked leer. It was an odd and enchanting picture they presented, she looking squarely up at Rafferty with a pair of large, laughing blue eyes from beneath a wide, jaunty sombrero, the Goat, with his head under her arm and with what might easily have been mistaken for a solemn grin playing around his open mouth, to which clung stray blades of grass, and Rafferty, with his head bent in confusion, twisting a well-worn greasy cap in his hands as a relief for his embarrassment. For a full minute they stood thus, giving no utterance to any sound. Then Billy bleated loudly, withdrew from the girl and, evidently believing it was his duty to make his master behave like a gentleman, gave Rafferty a gentle but decided prod in his stomach. The Girl laughed, the Goat tried to, and the man awoke.

"You are entirely excusable," he said, "and I am very glad if I have been the means of affording you any pleasure. Please pardon any seeming lack of manners on my part, Miss Hutchins; it is a long time since I have been used to ladies' society, and I suppose I have grown rusty."

"Ah! then you *were* used to good society!" she snapped him up. "I knew it! Now you *must* tell me your story!"

"But I haven't any to tell, I assure you," he protested. "I opine the Goat, if he could talk, would be more interesting."

"Never mind the Goat," she laughed, "he'll take care of himself. Goats usually do. Won't you confide in me? I won't use your name in my book, and I'll appreciate your confidence ever so much. But it's growing late," she added, looking at the disappearing sun, "so I'll let you off for today if you promise to come up to Papa's house some evening very soon and tell me all about it."

"Really, Miss Hutchins, if there was anything out of the ordinary in me or my career that it would benefit you or any one else to know, I would most gladly comply with your request," replied Rafferty.

"But the men say yours is the most interesting story of all," she persisted.

"You asked me just now, Miss Hutchins," he made reply, "if there were not times when the men failed to speak the truth, and I told you that was occasionally the case. This is one of the occasionallys! May I be allowed to escort you home?"

"Oh, no, thank you," she said, "it's quite light yet and Papa might — But" — she broke off, "I am not going home until you promise to call at the house some evening and let me judge for myself whether your story will be good for my book or not. Now, will you promise?"

"I will promise to call," he answered gravely. "Your father has often asked me to, but — I don't take to being pitied!"

She looked at him and he turned his face away. Checking herself from saying what was on her tongue, she said gently instead:

"Good-bye, Mr. Rafferty, I shall expect you."

He turned quickly, but not quickly enough. She was tripping gaily away and the Goat was following her. He stood and looked after her silently as long as she remained in sight. Then, with a deep sigh, he entered the rude cabin and went to work preparing his evening meal.

It was late when Billy came home. He had a wide blue ribbon tied around his neck, and narrow ones adorned the tips of his horns. Rafferty went to take them off, but Billy lowered his head viciously and his master, laughing, desisted. It was in this way the romance of Avesta Hutchins, Jack Rafferty and Rafferty's Goat began.

Rafferty kept his promise and called upon her — and remained much longer than he had intended to. Then it became noticed that he spruced up, that new store clothes came from Denver, and that when he was rigged out in them he was a very handsome and manly-looking fellow. After that it became common talk that he was an almost nightly visitor at "Old Hutchins'", that the Goat always kept him company, and that the girl was very fond — of

the Goat. It did not take the old man long to discover that she was also very fond of Rafferty.

Now, "Old Hutchins" liked Jack Rafferty well enough, and having had long experience in judging men and a keen intuition, he had long ago decided that the young man was superior to the station in life he was occupying and that it was no evil secret or act that had brought him out into the wilderness. Still, it was clear that he was penniless, and as a son-in-law — well, he had objections to his daughter doing so poorly from a financial standpoint. He did not worship Mammon, but he had a high regard for the value of money. At the same time, he worshipped his daughter, and he wished her to be happy and do well. At the same time, also, his daughter was quite aware that in most things she could have her own way with him.

When "Old Hutchins" had arrived at the conclusion that things had gone far enough and it was time to have a clear understanding he wasted no time in speaking his mind. He broke in upon Avesta and Jack at an inconvenient moment, brushing by Billy, who attempted to arrest his entrance, and they arose and faced him in confusion.

"Just sit down, you two," he said gruffly, "and listen to me. Let's understand the situation. This sort of thing has got to stop right here!"

"I love your daughter!" said Rafferty boldly.

"And I love Jack!" said the girl impulsively.

"Well, now," said "Old Hutchins," coolly, "I'm not a proud man, and I'm aware Jack Rafferty is a pretty decent sort of chap, and I haven't any doubt he can satisfy me as to his antecedents and his excellent character. But what in the Lord's name has he got to support a wife on, either in cash or prospects?"

The Goat bleated as much as to say: "Me — and I'm enough!" But neither the man nor the girl could give a satisfactory reply to the bluff question.

"Now, I'm a sensible sort of old fellow," Hutchins went on after a pause, "and I'm not going to rant or make a fool of myself. I don't want you to go running off, and I know the tricks of young folks when they're in what they call love and there's a fool father in the case. I ran off with your mother, Kid! So just let's

have an all-around understanding. You two promise me that this thing shan't go any further until Rafferty can show me he has twenty thousand dollars to his name — if there's anything in him he'll give up his job here and go make a strike somewhere — and I'll not object to your considering yourselves sweethearts."

"Old Hutchins" had reasoned the situation shrewdly. He was not adding to the fire by opposition, he was spurring Rafferty's ambition, and he was getting him out of the way. The advantages of the last fact were twofold — the girl would have a chance to forget him and some one else more agreeable to her father might come along and take his place. Then the condition he imposed was apparently fair and reasonable, while, in fact, under the circumstances, hardly possible for Rafferty to fulfil.

Of course, both the girl and Rafferty protested and argued, but "Old Hutchins" was obdurate, and they yielded to him — with mental reservations. He retired chuckling over his victory.

Rafferty remained awake all night pondering over the situation. It was clear that he could never comply with the old man's condition if he remained where he was. He might go back to Boston and resume the practice of the law, which had been his profession, or he might go to Alaska, then becoming famous for its mineral discoveries, and try his luck. This seemed to offer the better chance and he decided to take it.

The next morning, attended by the faithful Billy, he went to Avesta's to announce his determination and to bid her good-bye. It was a tearful meeting, but "Old Hutchins" expressed an assurance of Rafferty's success.

"But I must have one more look at your cabin with you, Jack," Avesta said, "before we part."

They trudged off together. Neither of them noticed, so absorbed were they in themselves, that Billy was not following. Billy was to be the especial care of Avesta while Jack was making his fortune.

It was close to noon when they heard a prolonged shouting and Billy hove into view, followed some distance behind by "Old Hutchins" and half a dozen miners.

"Look out for the damned Goat!" "Old Hutchins" cried hoarsely. "He's swallowed some dynamite and he's got a big stick in his mouth!"

Billy was making straight for the cabin, with his head bent down and the dynamite stick between his jaws. He did not see them, and was evidently suffering. Probably it was the first thing he had ever eaten which had disagreed with him. "Keep away!" Rafferty shouted back. "He'll strike the rock wall back of this and explode the stuff!"

Rafferty saw "Old Hutchins" and the men stop and throw themselves flat upon the ground. He caught Avesta up in his strong arms and fleetly ran down the mountain side with her. Billy was oblivious of everything, consumed by the desire to reach his master, whom he evidently expected to find in the cabin, and upon whom he was just as evidently relying for relief. On he came wildly and dashed through the open door into the cabin, the back of which was the solid rock against which it was set. Full against it he tilted in his agony. There was a roar of explosion, the cabin went up in splinters, large pieces of rock flew here and there, the floor of the cabin was blown completely away, and the force of the explosive, exerting itself downward, as dynamite always does, tore a big hole in the ground underneath it, exposing and rending the rock the earth had covered.

Five minutes later Rafferty and the girl, "Old Hutchins" and the men were viewing the ruins. Not a remnant of the Goat was to be seen.

"By heavens!" shouted "Old Hutchins" suddenly from out of the hole the dynamite had torn, into which he had jumped with professional thirst, "Here's the vein we've been looking for! The damned Goat's exposed it! The cabin was built on it! Rafferty, you're rich! Who'd 'a' thought an old Billy Goat would make such a strike!"

If the "Dynamite Goat Mine" were not so rich that it is impossible for Rafferty, even as its principal owner, to give away all it yields in rightly-directed charity, he would not be a millionaire; for it is a part of his creed that fortunate men owe duties to the unfortunate.

The Chance.*

BY LINDA DOWS.

WOULD that light burn forever? Should I never be relieved from the sight of the dim outline of the door, traced in rays shining uncertainly through?

I turned over and resolutely decided to sleep — to take no more notice of this soul-disturbing thing, but to pass the remaining hours of the night in slumber — and awake at morning to find all but an invention of my fancy. Imaginary sheep flitted through my brain — one hundred — two — and — yes, it was still shining. What horror, to realize that that which had been but an idle fancy had strengthened its hold on my mind, and now presented itself in the guise of an actual possibility.

The feeling of responsibility was the worst; no one else could know of that light streaming around the cracks of the closed door — none other of the sleeping campers knew that Whitmore's candle still burned, after every one else was at rest, while a quiet, an ominous stillness, reigned in that room opening out of mine. Reason murmured "He is sleeping," but Imagination quickly answered "There is a chance — a chance that mortal disease had seized him, and that he lay there dead or dying." Fancy the morning, finding him lying there so still, and the cold statement of the doctor, hurriedly summoned from a neighboring camp, "He might have been saved, had any one known of this in time." And I — I was the only one who knew.

Our parting had been commonplace enough. After we came up to bed — a noisy troop, excited by an evening around the card-table — he passed through my room into his own, lighted candle in hand. A few casual remarks, and the communicating door was closed. After a rapid disrobing, I blew out my guttering

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candle and turned in. A train of vague thought was interrupted by a glance at his door, between which and the jamb a light shone. Thinking nothing of this, I closed my eyes for sleep. Then, found myself staring at it with a vague anxiety, at which I laughed; absurd, the man's reading in bed. Another attempt to sleep, a light nap, and again my unwilling eyes were attracted towards the door. It drew them, this vague shining; every attempt at sleep was vain; always, I awoke, staring at that light. Gradually saner thoughts deserted me; the influence of the murky night crept over me, and my unformed dread assumed a definite shape — a haunting fear that would not be reasoned with, an absurd fear, may be, but one that would not be laughed away.

The lightning was brighter now; it lighted up all the bare little room. The scant camp furniture stood there as plainly as by day; my clothes, which had seen many an Adirondack storm, lay carelessly tossed across a chair; my gun, guilty of the life of many a deer, stood in the corner. All this, I knew rather than saw. I never look around during a flash of lightning. It might by its excessive brilliancy reveal something — something that it were better not to see.

How deeply are we imbued with the dread of ridicule! I have seen a dog cringe and slink away, when he had mistaken his master for a stranger and caused a merciless laugh around him. So should I feel, if I obeyed the impulse that was strong in me, and opened the dividing door, to find Whitmore calmly reading. And yet, that chance —

Once more I turned away from the haunting glimmer; once more I faced the dim square of window, which was ever and anon rendered more distinct by flashes of distant lightning.

Idly, my mind reverted to the scene of the evening: the log room, its great windows open to catch any lingering breeze; in the centre, the table under its huge hanging lamp. Eager faces all around it — did Whitmore's look paler than the rest? Accounted for surely by his morning's fatiguing drive into camp. Eager hands shuffling cards — did Whitmore's tremble more than the others? Surely, the result of an extended row that afternoon. How stands my Canfield score? One hundred more, and out of

debt — a black ten now, and a red seven — With a start, I sat up in bed; irresistibly, my eyes turned in the direction of the door. The light still shone. How long had I slept? Some time certainly, for the lightning now shone in at the window with greater frequency; and now, through the heavy air, came the distant, continuous rumble of an approaching storm. And still Whitmore read on, or — oh, the chance, the awful possibility! And no one knew of it but I.

The breeze came more strongly through the window, lifting the light curtain gently, blowing it softly into the room. I hate a curtain blowing that way at night; there is always the suggestion that a white hand is pushing it in; always the feeling that a face may appear at the opening. Once, years before, I nearly saw them — almost; almost could fancy that a hand did come through, where no human hand could reach; a face peer in where no human face could be. I never have curtains at my windows since that night; they suggest too much.

Certain words had for some time been sounding vaguely in my brain, passing through my sub-consciousness, an unnoticed undercurrent to my other thoughts. They yielded to a concentration of attention, and ranged themselves in view, together with the surroundings in which they were spoken. A trout stream, babbling over its rounded stones, running noisily through the forest. Four men, including myself, are fishing with long limber rods. One utters the words that are haunting me:

"Whitmore coming into camp next week? So that heart of his hasn't bowled him over yet! It may, you know, at any minute, his doctor told him. May live for years, sturdy as an oak; on the other hand, perhaps no external cause, or it may be a shock — and he is gone — snuffed out suddenly, like one of these candles we use here in the wilds."

Then rapidly through my mind passed in review unheeded incidents in my slight acquaintance with Whitmore, with now a new meaning, a bearing on the present situation. Whitmore never ran to catch a train. Whitmore never touched wine. Whitmore never added to his swimming accomplishments the sensational one of diving.

"At any minute!" Good God, this was the chance. Like a

great tidal wave, sweeping houses and men before it, the certainty that that was true which I had dreaded so shrinkingly, rushed over me, and swept away all my lingering doubts. It was true: he had died — died there in the next room, while I lay weakly afraid. Overwhelmed by this appalling thought, I leaped out of bed, stood for a second trembling in the soft breeze, then staggered to the door, and flung it open.

At the farther end of the room, on a shelf over the rough bed, burned a candle. On the bed itself was stretched a motionless form; one pale hand hung over the side, and below it on the floor was an open book. And on the pillow, a white face.

In one moment, all the wild thoughts of the night culminated in me in a frenzy. I rushed forward, and grasped the inanimate form by the shoulders — *shoulders that were warm with life.* Suddenly my trembling hands relaxed, for while his eyes, still dim with sleep, gazed with terror into mine, from his pale lips arose a wild shriek, which was drowned by a deafening crash of thunder overhead. And then — oh, horror! — oh, memory never to be effaced! — his hands clutched at his heart, his face grew livid, he gasped for breath, he fell back — dead.

The Call of the Hills.*

BY LUCRETIA DUNHAM CLAPP.

"THE mountains, the mist, and the moonlight! There ain't nothin' like 'em — is there, Jim?"

The girl looked up into the man's face. She stood leaning on the fence, both elbows resting on the top-rail, the moonlight showing full on her upturned face, softening the heavy lines of mouth and chin. All about them rose the mountains, steeped in moonlight and in shadow, rearing their wooded heights far into the evening sky. Behind them stretched the white road, and beyond that a small mountain cabin, surrounded by a few acres of rough, rudely-cultivated ground.

The September moon was waning, but the night was warm and pallid. The mists hung low, pierced with moonlight. A light wind, coming down the valley, blew strands of the girl's dark hair and wrapped her skirts about her, bringing out the strong, bold lines of her figure. She was heavily-built — large of bone, deep of bosom — an over-development, the result of heavy work, of toil in the fields from sunrise to sunset. Environment had played a great part in this girl's life, yet with the red blood that flowed through her veins there was health — great, bounding, joyous health. Her face showed the touches of mountain winds and of summer suns, and in her eyes lay a shadow; something of the mystery, perhaps, of the mountains themselves.

"The mountains, the mists, and the moonlight!" The girl's eyes wandered from the face of the man at her side to the far, dim line of hills; then they came slowly back again.

"I ain't never had much else, Jim, only night after night, just like this one, when I've stood here in this same spot and seen the moon come out and the hills begin to shadow. Seem'd like it was the only time of the day when there wan't nothin' to do; the sup-

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per done and the dishes washed and put away; pa a smokin' his pipe and the children in bed. Seem'd like the hills was a callin' me and I had to answer. It's all I ever had, Jim, till you come."

She paused, and her face showed pale.

"I guess I must have always liked you, ever since I could remember. An' we've been happy together, you an' me, — 'til — 'til the last few months. That's why I ast you to come tonight."

Her hands pressed hard on the rail in front of her.

"Don't you think I'm blamin' you, Jim. It's just one of those things that's got to be. I've watched it a comin' and I couldn't see no other way out of it. Why, the children was always a talkin' 'bout the new teacher, an' last spring when she was so good ——"

Her eyes went suddenly across the fields to where she could see in the moonlight a rough board that marked a long grave.

"Seem'd 's though there never was no time for me to go to school, what with the children a comin' so fast, an' all the mendin' and cookin', to say nothin' of the work in the fields. But I knew you loved me, Jim, and somehow I didn't care so much 'bout the other, — only for your sake, when I seen you goin' with the others. You've always had a longin' after books, and I noticed how you took right hold an' staid home a studyin', night after night. The mountains has been all the teacher I've ever known, an' they ain't never failed me yet. There's somethin' in their bigness an' their stillness that sometimes seems to just draw my heart right out. It kinder seem's though the Lord had made 'em for me."

She stretched out both arms with a wide, sweeping gesture.

"I love their awful silence. Sometimes it seems to answer somethin' inside of me, — a kind of longin' I can't just tell. You've been awful good to me, Jim, an' I know you loved me once. But I could see that you was a gettin' restless, seem'd like you wanted more'n just this. You us't to talk 'bout goin' away, even before the new teacher come. An' when she let you take all them books, — why, they wasn't nothin' to me, Jim, but a printed page. But I could see they was more to you. You ain't never been the same since. You've tried hard to love me an' to keep your promise, but it ain't no use. I've always loved you, Jim, an' I'd have worked for you an' been a good wife. But I won't never be any more'n I am now, — while she — she's more like you."

She paused and caught her breath.

"Besides I've been a thinkin' lately, perhaps it wouldn't be just right for me to leave pa an' the children. I don't want you to feel bad, Jim, — tain't no fault o' yours. Seem's like there's some things in this world that's just got to be."

Her voice died away suddenly. The man at her side shifted his feet uneasily. Her face showed white in the moonlight. Her full lips looked tight and drawn.

"I — I guess you'd better be a goin' now, Jim."

She held out her hand. He took it, and it felt hard and cold.

"Good-bye," she said slowly. Then, with a quick motion, she came nearer and looked up into his face.

"I wish you'd kiss me once, Jim, before you go — just once. 'Twon't be no wrong to her."

He stooped and pressed his lips on hers, hard and long.

"Good-bye," he said, and the tones of his voice roused her.

She watched him until he passed out of her sight down the road. Then she rested her arms upon the rail of the fence and laid her head down upon them. The moon rising higher above the distant hills, looked wan and white. The wind was blowing chill. The girl stood a few moments; then she turned slowly, crossed the white road, and went up the narrow path to the cabin that stood like a dark blotch on the white of the landscape. She pushed open the door and went in. The light from a single candle threw the greater part of the room in shadow. There were a few embers in the great open fire-place, and beside them sat her father, the rings of smoke from his pipe floating lazily upward to lose themselves amid the rough puncheons that formed the ceiling. He looked up as the girl entered. Then, though the night was warm, he stooped and knocked the embers apart until they sent up a tiny burst of flame.

The girl crossed the room, picked up a basket full of coarse stockings from the rude bench table, and seating herself near the candle thrust her needle in and out with a quick, sharp motion. The room was full of a pungent odor from the red peppers and bunches of dried herbs that hung from the ceiling.

The old man, shifting his gaze from the fire, removed his pipe and opened his lips.

"Where's ——", he began. The girl looked up quickly. Two bright spots of color burned in either cheek.

"You'd better be a goin' to bed, pa. It's a gettin' late."

Then the needle flashed in and out again swiftly, silently. The old man drew a few more puffs; then he stooped and knocked the ashes from his pipe. He rose and crossed the room and, with a rough, unwonted tenderness, laid one heavy hand on her shoulder.

"Good-night, pa," she answered, sharply.

A little while later she folded and laid away the last stocking. Then she rose, and, taking up the candle, passed slowly into the room that she had shared with the other children ever since she could remember. Without undressing she blew out the candle and threw herself down upon the hard bed and lay there, staring up at the ceiling, wide-eyed, sleepless. She could hear the sound, deep breathing of the children, but she was conscious of nothing save this new sense of pain, of loneliness, of longing. She tried to grasp it, to put it in front of her that she might fight it fairly, but it eluded her, creeping in and tightening itself about her heart-strings. The four walls of the cabin seemed stifling her.

She had never known human sympathy. She had never felt the need of it. Born of the mountains, living her life beneath the shadow of their mystery, finding in their wild cañons and deep gorges, their sweeping winds and cold, still summits, an answer to the mystery of life, to the dim silence of the soul. In their loneliness they had called to her, and they were calling her now. She rose dumbly and passed into the outer room. The embers had died down, leaving only a pile of dead ashes on the hearth. She unbarred the heavy door and went out into the night. The stillness was like velvet. Before her stretched the long, white road; beyond it the mountains bathed in mists, dark with shadows. She hurried on and on, all the wild unrest of heart and brain reaching out in answer to this wordless, unknown call. Now the mists and the darkness enfolded her; great crags, cloud-capped, towered above her. She struggled on dumbly.

On all sides of her rose the great forest trees. Through the dense foliage the moonlight shifted faintly. Now and then the tangled undergrowth tripped her. Huge boulders, washed down by some mountain torrent, lay across the path. The smell of vege-

tation, damp, reeking with death and decay, came to her nostrils. The long, complaining note of some night-bird reached her ears, and far away in the distance the bark of a coyote. Once she paused, feeling some human presence near, but it was only the rippling of a mountain brook and the wailing of the wind.

At length, exhausted, she sank down close to a great boulder. She rested her arm against the rock and leaned her head upon it. Dimly she felt the peace of the vast, pregnant silence. Far below her lay the valley, shrouded in mists; above her the great heights shrouded in mystery, and calling, ever calling.

She started up suddenly, conscious of a new element. The wind was rising. All about her she could feel the deep undertone of the forest. She stood still and listened, and for the first time felt a vague fear. From the distance she heard the deep boom of the mountain torrent. A light flashed among the trees, followed by a roar that seemed to come from the very bowels of the mountains. The wind had quickened into terrible life. The great trunks of the trees bent and swayed; boulders and pieces of rock rolled down the mountain sides.

The girl knelt down, hiding her face. The roar deepened. Suddenly, from above, there came a mighty undercurrent of sound. Down from the summit, crashing, tearing, splitting the ground in wide, yawning seams, came a mighty forest monarch. It tore through the ranks of the other trees with swift and terrible force. The girl, lifting her head, watched it coming. She stood as one in a dream, making no sound, no motion. Suddenly she stretched out her arms. There was a blinding flash; a quiver; a great cry that lost itself, only to find its echo in the shriek of the winds.

. . . . . .

The night quivered into silence. The winds slunk away. Folded in their mystery, in their unfathomable stillness, vast, pregnant, primeval, rose the mountains. Their hills had called to her and she had answered their call.

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